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Nicaraguan troops rout guerrillas

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MANAGUA, Nicaragua—Sandinista army troops killed 52 Nicaraguan counterrevolutionaries during three days of heavy fighting in two northern provinces and routed another guerrilla column in a third area, government officials said Tuesday.

In addition, Interior Minister Tomas Borge dismissed reports that former Sandinista revolutionary hero Eden "Commander Zero" Pastora had established guerrilla forces in the southern half of the country, adding that if Pastora really wants to fight, "we welcome him with open arms."

A Defense Ministry communique said 47 U.S.-backed rebels were killed over the weekend by regular Sandinista army troops.

Twenty-one *contras* were killed Sunday near the town of Wiwili in northern Jinotega province, the communique said. Twenty-six more were reported killed near the town of San Jose de Bocay on Friday and Saturday.

Five more rebels were ambushed and killed while attempting to blow

● Nicaraguans seek peace in Honduran refugee camps. Report in Focus, Back Page.

up a power station in northwestern Chinandega province, Borge said.

The Defense Ministry said six Sandinista soldiers were killed in the three days of combat.

THE CLAIMS were impossible to verify. Two pro-government newspapers on Tuesday published pictures of stacks of bodies of uniformed men it said were *contras* slain in battle.

Borge said the rebels used a U.S.-made rocket against Nicaraguan Energy Institute facilities in Chinandega but caused no major damage. He said Sandinista forces captured three prisoners and recovered "various arms of North American manufacture," but he did not elaborate.

The Defense Ministry also reported that army troops drove out a column of 120 rebels in north-central Matagalpa province after heavy fighting, but it gave no details.

Diplomats and other observers said it was significant that the go-

vernment announcements cited regular Sandinista army troops in the combat reports. Up to now, army reservists and civilian militias have borne the brunt of the fighting against rebel forces in the north, although there are indications more regular army units have been sent there in recent days.

"It could be that they are really starting to feel a threat," one Western observer said.

AT A PRESS conference, Borge discounted the threat posed by Pastora, the ex-Sandinista guerrilla commander whose daring exploits helped topple dictator Anastasio Somoza in 1979.

Pastora, who a year ago went into exile and announced his opposition to the left-leaning regime, declared war against the Sandinista government Friday in a communique that said he was "in the mountains of Nicaragua" with a guerrilla force.

Asked Tuesday about photographs released in Costa Rica that purported to show Pastora and his armed followers in Nicaraguan territory, Borge said: "That is no proof of anything. He could have had them taken in his back yard. If he really is coming back to Nicaragua, we welcome him with open arms."

Word of Pastora's call to arms has been censored here, and a government campaign began months ago to discredit him as a traitor and CIA agent.

Lately, the government has described him and his followers as *Somocistas*, or Somoza loyalists, the same label it uses for the counterrevolutionaries in the north. But Pastora has publicly refused to join forces with the northern rebels.

ESTIMATES of the size of Pastora's guerrilla force range from a few hundred men to 4,000.

Some observers say that to regain the large following he once had in Nicaragua, Commander Zero is under pressure to stage an audacious military assault.

"All of Nicaragua is waiting for Pastora to try something spectacular," said one observer, who added that support for the onetime revolutionary hero has not been visible here so far.

Noting that Pastora has been perceived to be vacillating, the observer said: "It could be that he waited too long."